

Quebec First Nations

Our Economy, Our Future

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"First Nations in Quebec want their communities to have access to economic prosperity, while dealing with the challenge of preserving ancestral traditions and finding innovative practices in forest management. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development will encourage any form of partnership that will enable First Nations to participate in the economic expansion of their region and improve the living conditions of their communities."

- Robert D. Nault

Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

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*Premières nations au Québec
notre économie, notre avenir*

Introduction

Quebec First Nations Taking Charge of their Economic Future

Today's entrepreneurs include the men and women of Quebec First Nations who are taking charge of their destinies by establishing new businesses and securing a prosperous future for themselves, their families and their communities. Developing sustainable economies is key as they move toward self-government.

In response to the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Speech from the Throne, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) has helped launch many Aboriginal business ventures, and supported the goal of achieving strong communities, people and economies.

Several First Nations communities in Quebec have focussed on natural resources for business opportunities, especially in the forestry sector. Quebec's economy has been built on an extensive network of small-and medium-size businesses, and the economic development of many First Nations communities has benefited from partnerships between these types of businesses and larger, well-established forestry companies.

Since 1998, DIAND has invested more than \$10 million in 173 Quebec Aboriginal businesses and initiatives, especially in the forestry and tourism sectors. Meet the people behind some of these successful enterprises in this special advertising feature.

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Economic Development

Economic development is at the heart of the Government of Canada's commitment to build strong First Nation communities and economies. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Robert D. Nault, is quite emphatic when talking about the issue. "We are partners with First Nations. We will work together towards a better future and we'll do it by taking a practical, balanced and integrated approach."

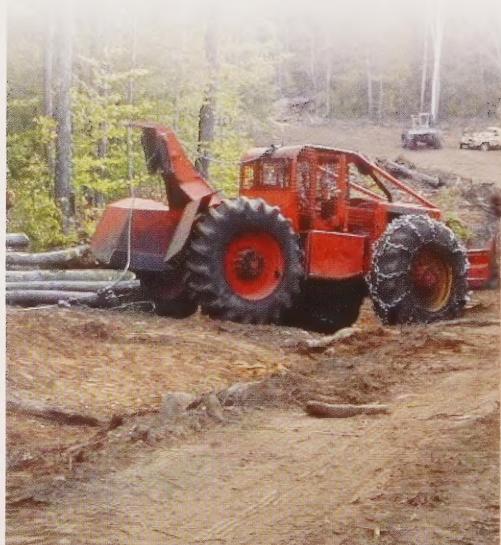
That commitment is backed with federal government money. Support funds allow First Nations to enter into partnerships on regional projects, such as infrastructure and resource development. These, in turn, lead to other partnership projects with the private sector and other levels of government.

Photo : Tessa MacIntosh



This trend toward self-determination is evident across the country. In the past 10 years, the number of new Aboriginal-owned businesses has exceeded those of the rest of the Canadian population by 105 percent. There are now 20,000 Aboriginal-owned businesses in Canada, spanning all sectors of the economy. These businesses create jobs for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and help strengthen local economies.

However, these businesses can't grow and prosper without access to loans and investment capital. "This is the major hurdle we must clear before we can create jobs and break the cycle of dependency that exists within Aboriginal communities," Minister Nault says. "We must work together to eliminate financial obstacles and develop equal opportunities. Only then can we hope to have long-term economic self-sufficiency in Aboriginal communities."



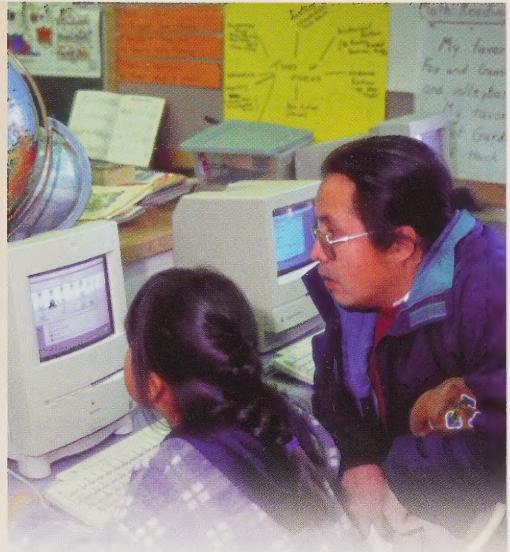
Employment

Aboriginal youth are a dynamic component of Quebec's workforce – and of Canadian society. They are the country's future leaders, educators, professionals and role models. They are the links between Canada's history and traditions and its vision for the future. But right now, they must still deal with the highest levels of unemployment and poverty in Canada.

In the next 10 years, the Aboriginal workforce will grow at twice the rate of the total Canadian workforce. According to the Conference Board of Canada, an additional 160,000 jobs will be needed by 2006 in order to maintain the current level of Aboriginal employment.

When First Nations and Inuit youth acquire the skills and experience they need to meet the demands of the marketplace, the entire country — not just Aboriginal communities — benefits. Establishing successful partnerships that involve corporations, governments and communities is an important part of meeting these demands.

Photo : Tessa MacIntosh



Most modern-day partnerships between industry and Aboriginal people include "benefit agreements," which address issues like education, training, and first rights to jobs and service contracts. These agreements help ensure that members of First Nations share the benefits of the new enterprises.

"We have the best-educated generation of First Nations people ever," says Minister Nault. "They are well trained and equipped to make their way in the new global, knowledge-based economy. The rest of the country, especially the business sector, is starting to wake up to this reality."

Quebec's future depends on the same kind of determination, tenacity and vision shared by the first people to live here: the First Nations and the men and women who carved out a living and life from this rugged landscape. There are challenges, but progress is being made. The Government of Canada's ongoing commitment is part of that vision.



Making a difference and making money too!

- Native Venture Capital Fund -

Members of Quebec First Nations are changing the way they think about the economic development of their communities. Gas stations, lunch counters, convenience stores and guide services are still an important part of their local economies. But a new venture capital fund that's geared to the needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs is going to make it possible for them to grow beyond small, family-run businesses.

The Quebec Native Venture Capital Partnership (better known as SOCARIAQ, the acronym of its French-language name, Société de capital de risque autochtone du Québec) is the first fund of its kind in Canada. When it was launched last May, the Government of Canada announced it would invest \$1.7 million in the fund: \$1 million from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to capitalize the fund and \$700,000 from Industry Canada, to be used for operational costs through its Aboriginal Business Canada program.

"We believe this venture capital fund is essential to the economic development of First Nation communities," says Robert D. Nault, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. "This is part of our commitment to Aboriginal entrepreneurs who will become key players in their communities, role models — and employers."

"There's a baby boom happening in many First Nations communities. And people living in these communities realize they have to develop their economies to keep up with their birthrate. If they don't, well, more people and fewer jobs is an equation for misery."

Pierre Pinsonneault

SOCARIAQ, whose offices are located in Wendake, Quebec, has several founding partners that have invested a total of \$6 million in the fund's investment capital pool: Fonds de solidarité FTQ, Mouvement des caisses Desjardins, Native Benefits Plan, Native Commercial Credit Corporation (SOCCA) and the Corporation de développement économique montagnaise (CDEM). Quebec's Secrétariat des affaires autochtones also invested \$700,000 for the fund's operational costs.



Photo : Michel Lessard

Pierre Pinsonneault

Pierre Pinsonneault, the fund's general manager, has worked in the investment banking and securities industry for more than 20 years, including stints at Scotia McLeod and the Montreal Exchange. SOCARIAQ offered him a different kind of challenge. "It's not just about First Nations making money. It's about making a difference. And this fund is going to make a real difference to Aboriginal entrepreneurs whose ambitions have been limited because they didn't have access to the funds they needed."

The fund will help businesspeople in one of three ways: by offering to buy part of a company outright; by providing an unsecured loan; or by negotiating a participating loan at a lower rate of interest in exchange for a percentage of the revenues or profits, often a good option during a company's early years when it usually makes less money.

SOCARIAQ officially opened for business on May 6, 2002, three days after Minister Nault announced DIAND's investment in the fund. Since then, Pinsonneault has received 10 submissions from across the province. The business plans have come from both established and start-up companies in a variety of industries, from high-tech to forestry to publishing.

According to Pierre Pinsonneault, the idea for the fund came from Aboriginal people living in Quebec. "There's a baby boom happening in many First Nations communities. And people living in these communities realize they have to develop their economies to keep up with their birthrate. If they don't, well, more people and fewer jobs is an equation for misery."

But there are other compelling reasons a venture capital fund was created specifically for Aboriginal businesses. According to Tom O'Connell, who teaches at the John Molson School of Business at Concordia University in Montreal, one of the main reasons is that, under terms of the *Indian Act*, investors in an Aboriginal business can't seize its assets should it fail. "Financial institutions are reluctant to invest in Aboriginal businesses," he says. "It's just too risky. If an Aboriginal entrepreneur can't put up property as collateral, then how can the investor recoup his losses if the company goes bankrupt? Also, venture capital funds prefer companies with established track records — which few First Nations businesses have."

Tom O'Connell has high hopes for the fund. "Entrepreneurial activity is at the heart of the economic development of any community. SOCARIAQ is going to allow Aboriginal entrepreneurs to 'think outside the box,' to dream on a larger scale, to go beyond the 'mom and pop' businesses and create something of substance, perhaps a business that will allow them to provide jobs for the youth of the community and develop spin-off opportunities too," he says. "It's true that there is an Aboriginal baby boom. And that's an advantage. These businesses will have ready access to a growing labour force — something the rest of Canada doesn't have."

Pierre Pinsonneault will be doing a lot of travelling in the next few years, getting to know the province and its First Nations communities better than he'd ever imagined. "I've already been to Winneway and Essipit, and have been in Montreal meeting with Chiefs, trying to get the message out." And what message is he bringing to Aboriginal people living in Quebec? "If you have a business idea, we want to hear about it," stresses Pinsonneault. "We have money to invest. But we're not a charitable organization. This is private money that is seeking a good return. And we will make a good return only if the Aboriginal entrepreneur makes a good return."

SOCARIAQ's

ultimate goal is to create self-sustaining communities and Pierre Pinsonneault believes that this fund is an important first step towards that goal.

*For further information about
SOCARIAQ, contact:*

Pierre Pinsonneault

(418) 843-7070

ppinsonneault@socariaq.ca



Photo : Tessa MacIntosh

Working together for a better tomorrow tomorrow

- Gesgapegiag First Nation -

It's been four years since Catherine Johnson first climbed into a single engine plane and flew over the Baldwin Territory in the Haute Gaspésie. But she remembers, as though it were yesterday, what she saw as she peered through the window at the ground below. "It was the first time I had seen clear cutting. The earth looked absolutely ravaged. I couldn't believe it. I was near tears. I asked myself how it could have happened. Then I thought, 'We have to find a way to stop this!'"



Photos: PESCA Environnement

Quentin Condo, left, improves his carpentry skills, working with Karen Martin to create a dock for Lac Berry.

Ms. Johnson, who had just been hired as the Gesgapegiag Band Council's Director of Economic Development, is quick to point out that the forestry companies hadn't violated any agreements with the government. She understands that they're there to make money. But that day, she vowed she'd find a way for the companies, the government and her community to work together to develop the forest

without destroying it. And she'd do it in such a way that her people would also profit.

Catherine Johnson has been true to her word. When she was hired in 1998, the Gesgapegiag Band Council already had a few small contracts with local forestry companies. "They were doing pre-commercial clearing, thinning the brush from young growth forests so the marketable trees can grow more easily. But things hadn't been going well." The workers were inexperienced and Ms. Johnson realized that job training was the key to quality results. She insisted that the members of her community get the training they needed to do the job.

"I didn't want to get contracts because the forestry companies felt they had to respond to some sort of social obligation," says Johnson. "I wanted to get these contracts because I knew we could do the work as well as anyone else."

Since then, she's helped establish several training programs with local forestry companies like Tembec, Rexforêt, Cederico, G.D.S. and St. Alphonse Forestry Products. Where there were once three jobs, there are now 15. Another dozen workers, half of them women, are in training. Most of the seasonal positions are filled by community members between the ages of 18 and 25 who now have a reason to stay.

Leonard Leblanc, a supervisor at Rexforêt, stresses that the goal is to train these young people for permanent jobs. "There's a lot of potential. There are a lot of young people in this region who are looking for work. If we want to keep them in this region, we have to make sure they can get the work," he says.

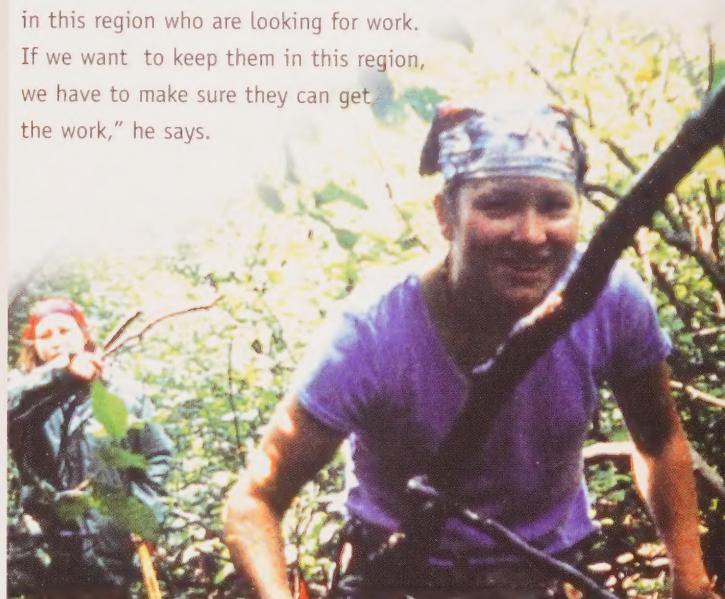


Photo : PESCA Environnement

Stream cleaning... Karen Martin and Charlene Burnsé clear one of the small streams that feeds into Lac Berry.



Norman Gideon (right) helps Karen Martin and Quentin Condo put a new dock in place.

The revenue the band earns from these contracts allows them to buy the equipment they need for pre-commercial clearing. It's a simple equation: better equipment leads to more long-term contracts, and more jobs for members of their community. "With the money we've made — and a grant of close to \$600,000 from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's Marshall Strategy — we were able to buy a 'Menzi Muck,'" says Ms. Johnson. "It's a harvesting machine from Switzerland that's very agile on steep slopes and doesn't tear up the soil as it works an area."

That respect for the land is important to Catherine Johnson and other Gesgapegiag Micmac. "Sustainable development is not a new concept to us," she explains. "A lot of those strategies are based on traditional First Nations knowledge."

Wildlife management is another sector with the potential to generate more jobs in the community. The Gesgapegiag Micmac are currently negotiating with Quebec's Ministère des Ressources naturelles du Québec and the Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec (FAPAQ) to jointly manage the Lac Ste. Anne/Baldwin area. For the past three summers, nine young people have worked with local company PESCA Environnement to draw up a wildlife inventory, clean the riverbeds, and build a visitor reception centre.

Quentin Condo, a 22-year-old member of the Gesgapegiag community, is one of those young people. He has worked as a field researcher for PESCA Environnement for four years, from the thick of black fly season to the first freeze-ups of December. Some days would begin at 3 a.m. with a two hour truck ride into the bush. From there, the research team would set off in canoes on the rushing waters of the Grand Cascapedia River. Their mission: to see how erosion, caused by the past clear cutting in this area, has affected the spawning grounds of the Atlantic salmon.

"Some days, there'd still be ice on the river," Condo explains. "Our fingers would be freezing as we'd clear away the snow from the banks of the river to check on the erosion. But occasionally, we would come up ever so quietly on a school of Atlantic salmon in a deep pool. They're so beautiful, they just take your breath away."

Quentin Condo has also worked with biologists to create an inventory of the different species of trees, plants, fish and wildlife, has cut walking trails and helped to build the visitor reception area at Berry Lake. Not surprisingly, he is tremendously enthusiastic about his work.

"I could have worked at a forestry job," he says, "but I was really interested in a job that would allow me to explore ways of protecting the Baldwin territory. This is our future. Tourism is big business in the Gaspé. If you take away the trees, the salmon, the Baie des Chaleurs area, we're left with nothing."

This fall, after his fifth season with PESCA Environnement, Condo will begin a course in Eco-Interpretation at the CÉGEP de la Gaspésie et des Îles. He hopes it will give him the skills he needs for a career in the eco-tourism field. "This is my home. I want to stay here. I want to work here," he says. "Most of all, I want to share the beauty of this area with other people."

It's stories like Quentin's that keep Catherine Johnson looking for ways that her community and local companies can work together. "It's not always easy, finding and keeping that needed balance between making money and protecting the environment," she says. "But it can be done. It takes dedication, knowledge and assertiveness. We're seeing results. But it takes time. Like a tree in the forest... it doesn't grow overnight."

A cutting edge partnership

- Scierie Opitciwan -

Trust. That's the key to a successful partnership. Just ask Simon Awashish and Louis-Marie Bouchard, who worked together to help create a sawmill in the Atikamekw community of Obedjiwan, 350 km northwest of La Tuque.

Simon Awashish was Chief four years ago when the band council decided to seek out a business partner for the sawmill they wanted to build in their isolated community on the shores of the Gouin Reservoir. "There was no full-time employment in the community then," explains Awashish. "Sixty percent of the 1,600 residents were on social assistance. There were seasonal jobs with some of the forestry companies — clearing brush, planting trees — but nothing permanent, nothing that would sustain our community. We saw the forestry companies cutting trees and hauling the logs down south. Some of us thought that it was time to keep the work — and the profit — here in Obedjiwan."



Photo : Scierie Opitciwan

Wood chips are loaded for transport to a pulp and paper mill in St. Félicien, near Lac St. Jean.

Louis-Marie Bouchard agreed with Awashish. Bouchard, Senior Vice President of Donohue Inc., as the company was then



Photo : Scierie Opitciwan

Opitciwan Sawmill has become the economic heart of Obedjiwan, an isolated Atikamekw community located on the shores of the Gouin Reservoir.

known, was quite clear about his company's intentions. "We'd been in Obedjiwan since 1993, hiring people to work with us during the clearing and planting season," he says. "We wanted to build on that relationship."

Building on the relationship was made easier by the fact that they'd already established an excellent reputation with the Atikamekw. "When they first came to the region," explains Awashish, "representatives from Donohue Inc. (which has since been acquired by Abitibi-Consolidated) met with the band council to discuss what impact their logging plans might have on local trap lines and hunting grounds. They spoke with us before following through with plans to finish building the road that connected our community with St. Félicien. They were the first forestry company to ever ask for our input."

That initial respect weighed heavily in Abitibi-Consolidated's favour when they made their pitch to become partners in the sawmill. The Atikamekw chose the company and the negotiations began — without lawyers.

That was another important factor in their success, stresses Louis-Marie Bouchard. "No lawyers. No consultants. Just the band council and us, hammering out a deal."

And once again, company representatives recognized that respect for First Nations culture was essential. "There are certain times of the year when it would be pointless to keep the sawmill open because no one is going to be there during either goose, beaver and moose hunting seasons, or the blueberry harvesting season," explains Bouchard. "So, we proposed a 45-week schedule that took the hunting and harvesting seasons into account."

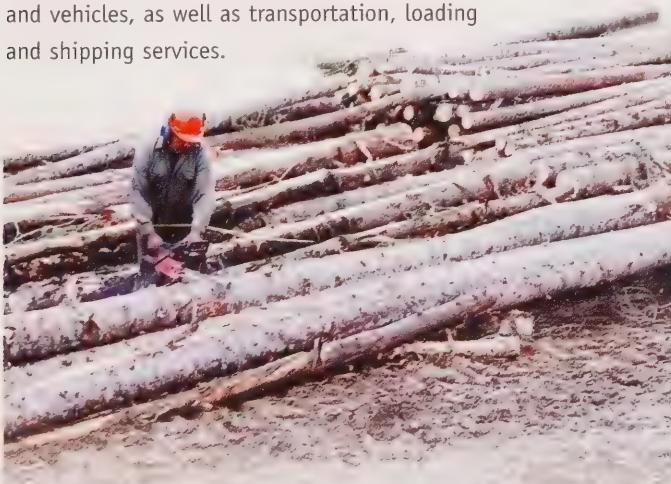
Abitibi-Consolidated had other strengths, too. "They'd built and managed sawmills before," says Awashish. "They had

solid markets in Canada and the U.S. We believed they could go the distance. This wasn't a company that was reaching beyond what it could do."

Each partner had its own responsibilities. The Atikamekw community was responsible for supplying the timber, providing the workforce and training. Abitibi-Consolidated concentrated on getting the sawmill built, managing it, and selling the lumber.

Once they worked out a deal, the partners went looking for money. Close to one-third of the \$8.25 million came from the Canadian government, through programs and initiatives at the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Industry Canada, Canada Economic Development and Human Resources Development Canada. Some were loans; some were grants. The provincial government worked with the team to establish purchase commitment grants and forest management agreements that allowed an annual cut of 120,000m³ of wood.

It's been four years since the sawmill opened, and general manager Manon Pelletier points with pride to the business's accomplishments: annual sales of \$8 million; a Forestry Services section, wholly owned by the band council; with contracts for logging, reforestation, clearing and forest management work, worth \$7.5 million. And most important, jobs: full-time jobs for 65 people, 55 of whom are Aboriginal. The company's annual payroll is \$2.8 million; the Forestry Services section pays out more than \$800,000 to 60 seasonal workers, all of whom are Aboriginal. Other companies have been created to support the sawmill, providing machinery and vehicles, as well as transportation, loading and shipping services.



From chainsaw to sawmill...Opitciwan Sawmill provides 65 full-time jobs in a community where 60 percent of the residents were once on social assistance.

It's no surprise that the First Peoples Business Association has already given the Opitciwan Sawmill two awards at its Mishtapew Awards of Excellence Gala: the Business Creation Award (1998) and the Native Business of the Year Award (2001), which is sponsored by Canada Economic Development.



Photo : Scierie Opitciwan

"We wanted this sawmill to be a success," stresses Abitibi-Consolidated Senior Vice President Louis-Marie Bouchard. "And we're proud of the fact that no new money has had to go into the company. No grants, no other loans. We're making money and we're putting it right back into the company."

Pride is another word that Simon Awashish uses often when talking about the sawmill. "There is such a strong feeling of pride. We've built more than 80 houses in our community in the past four years, using lumber from our own sawmill," he says. "We had the money to build a sports centre last fall. This sawmill is more than just a sawmill. It's radically changed our lives."

It is, above all, a sawmill built on respect and on mutual trust, "...and no lawyers," Louis-Marie Bouchard stresses once more. "No lawyers."

A soaring success

- Eagle Forest -

Photo : Corporation de gestion de la forêt de l'Aigle



Logging continues in Eagle Forest, but in a controlled way that incorporates both traditional and modern methods. Thirty-two thousand cubic metres of wood — maple, ash, oak, white and yellow birch, and beech, red and white pine — is cut each year and sold to a sawmill in the Outaouais.

The Eagle Forest near Maniwaki was once the traditional hunting and trapping grounds of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg. The 14,000 hectare forest sheltered moose, deer, fox, wolf and other small game, and it supported the people living within its borders.

Today, it is part of an “inhabited forest” program that promotes a mixed-use approach to both sustainable development and environmental protection of the woodland, giving the Algonquin of the Kitigan Zibi community a way of making their living from the forest once more.

“Canadian International Paper (CIP) used to log this forest,” explains Marc Beaudoin, Director General of the Corporation de Gestion de la Forêt de l’Aigle (CGFA). “Then, in the 1980s, the province changed its policy on commercial cutting, deciding who should have the right to log and develop the province’s forests. CIP lost their cutting rights to Eagle Forest and, in 1996, this land was given back to the community. It’s now our responsibility to manage it and profit from it. Our goal is to do that in a way that respects both the land and the community.”

Seven organizations joined together to create the Eagle Forest Administration Committee: the Société Sylvicole, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, the Municipalité de Cayamant, ZEC (zone d’exploitation contrôlé) Bras-Coupe Desert, the snowmobile club Les Ours Blancs, the ZEC Pontiac, and l’Institut Québécois d’Aménagement de la Forêt Feuillue.

Marc Beaudoin, who has been with the project since its earliest days, is especially pleased with how well the partners work together. “These are people who might not even have spoken with one another before working on this project. There was a certain amount of distrust, perhaps a lack of understanding of what each wanted. Now, we all want the same thing — to successfully manage our community’s resources, to enjoy our land and to promote Eagle Forest as a place where people can come to play. It’s not just a place for snowmobile and quad racing. We want to promote other uses as well: snowshoeing, dog-sledding, cross-country skiing, hiking and cycling. So far, we’ve cut close to 150 kilometres of recreational trails.”

The inhabited forest project has meant jobs, too. Since 1996, eight full-time positions and 60 seasonal jobs have been created — 35 of them related to the forestry services. Logging continues in Eagle Forest, but in a controlled way

that ensures there will be trees to cut for generations to come. One of the management partners, Société Sylvicole, oversees the



One of Eagle Forest’s smaller residents enjoys a warm summer day.



Dogsledding is becoming increasingly popular as a winter sport. This team of dogs gives tourists a ride they'll never forget.

annual cut of 32,000 cubic metres of hardwood: maple, ash, oak, white and yellow birch, and beech. The wood is sold to sawmills in the Outaouais. Timber sales, and money from recreational use of the forest topped \$2.5 million last year.

"It's important to protect the forest's biodiversity. This is our land. If we don't take care of it, who will? Once animals like the wood turtle are gone, they never come back. Protecting this land is one of our highest priorities."

André Dumont

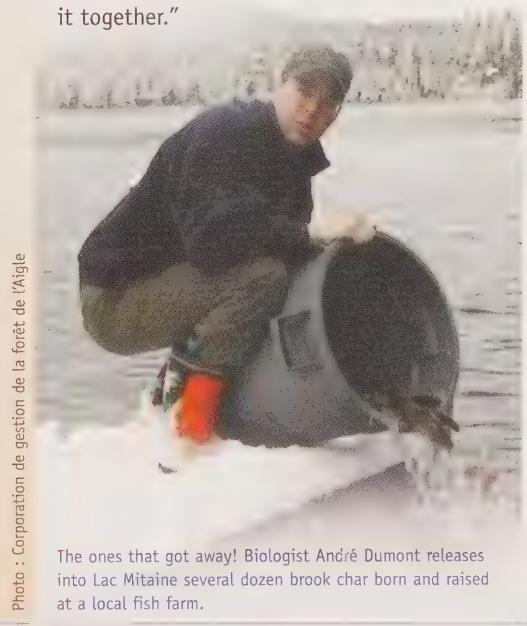
One of his four-legged subjects is the wood turtle, so-called because it ventures deep into the forest, away from the water, during the summer months. Eagle Forest is home to about 150 of these reptilian creatures — one of the largest populations in the province. It's classified as a "vulnerable" species and Dumont hopes his work will contribute to its survival. He's tagged a dozen of the turtles with radio-tracking devices that allow him to study their habits and habitat. He's built secure egg laying sites for them and has set up screens around their nests to help protect the wood turtle from its predatory neighbour, the raccoon.

But not everyone's eye is on the bottom line. When André Dumont, a biologist who has been working full-time for the CGFA since 1998, walks through Eagle Forest, he doesn't see trees measured in cubic metres. He sees "an open-sky laboratory," where the experiments run wild.

The wood turtle project is only part of what André Dumont does in Eagle Forest. He reviews management plans for the forest's development and maintains wildlife inventories to make sure that the logging and recreational use of the forest isn't harming the animals. He's also helped develop an interpretation trail and will often offer guided tours to visitors.

Dumont is passionate about his work in Eagle Forest. "It's important to protect the forest's biodiversity. This is our land. If we don't take care of it, who will? Once animals like the wood turtle are gone, they never come back. Protecting this land is one of our highest priorities."

Balancing those priorities is Marc Beaudoin's responsibility. And he's proud of his community's enthusiasm and success. "When you take on a project like this," he says, "you want to have an impact — and we have. It's so exciting to see people take charge of their future. We've created jobs. We're managing our own resources, without depending on others. We're deciding what's best for us and our community. And the most important thing is, we're doing it together."



The ones that got away! Biologist André Dumont releases into Lac Mitaine several dozen brook char born and raised at a local fish farm.

A profitable paradise

- Tourilli -

Photo : Conseil de la Nation huronne-wendat



Relais du Lac Ste. Anne, in the Réserve Faunique des Laurentides, is a snowbound oasis with plenty of services for travelling snowmobilers.

Snowmobilers travelling in the Tourilli sector of the Réserve Faunique des Laurentides must think they've stumbled onto the northern, snowbound equivalent of a desert oasis when they arrive at Relais du Lac Ste. Anne. The menu at the Huron-Wendat restaurant, Ehtohsarot (Huron for Relais du Lac Ste. Anne), rivals anything they'd find in Quebec City, two hours to the south. In fact, gourmet diners would be hard-pressed to find a menu anywhere that includes caribou brochette, venison bourguignon, wild rabbit paté, smoked salmon, trout, duck and partridge, and the signature soup of the restaurant: Potage Huron Sagamité, made with wild game, red beans and corn and served with bannock.

"People are a bit taken aback when they visit our restaurant," says Rejean Gros-Louis, with a certain flair for the understatement. "When we opened in December 1999, we decided we wanted something more than a poutine, fast food kind of place." Gros-Louis, the economic development officer for the Huron-Wendat community, reveals the secret of the restaurant's success — Chef Marquis Daigle. Daigle's résumé includes stints as head chef at Club Med locations in Mexico and the Caribbean, and top restaurants in Quebec City. It's not surprising that once snowmobilers eat at the Ehtohsarot, they usually start making plans to return.

Gros-Louis is quick to point out the other benefits of the Relais: a gas station and seven cabins built by the Huron-Wendat, and tourism packages that include snowshoeing to nearby trap lines or a day of ice fishing. Each of the cabins have hot showers and can sleep six. The really adventurous snowmobiler can opt for a night sleeping in a teepee.

The Huron-Wendat First Nation and the St. Raymond Snowmobile Club, with the Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (SEPAQ), have helped to make the small town of St. Raymond, 40 km northwest of Quebec City, a snowmobiler's paradise. "This is the snowmobile capital of Quebec," says Marcel Bérubé, president of the snowmobile club. "Approximately 3,000 snowmobilers pass through St. Raymond each week.

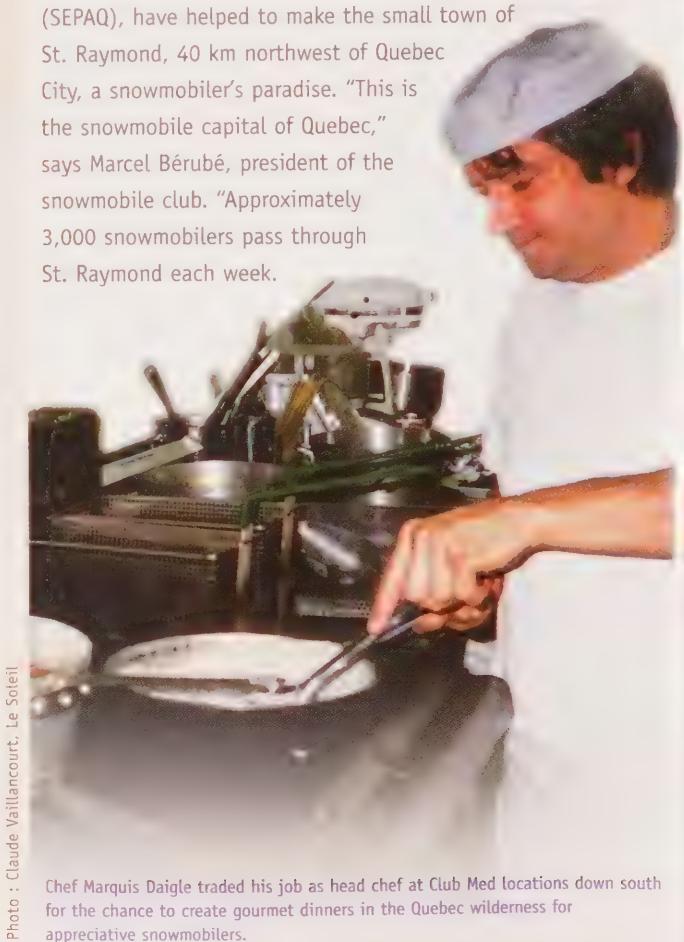


Photo : Claude Vaillancourt, Le Soleil

Chef Marquis Daigle traded his job as head chef at Club Med locations down south for the chance to create gourmet dinners in the Quebec wilderness for appreciative snowmobilers.



Chalet Gabriella, a few steps from Relais du Lac Ste. Anne, is one of several chalets for rent.

A lot of them from the States; some from Europe. Last week I counted more than 200 trailers parked outside the local motels — each would carry at least two snowmobiles. That's a lot of people."

Indeed. Tourism is big business in St. Raymond. According to Bérubé, revenue directly related to snowmobiling has tripled from \$5 million in 1993 to \$15 million today.

With funding from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's Resource Access Negotiation Plan (RANP), the Huron-Wendat have profited from those tourism dollars, negotiating agreements with local partners. They're currently in the second year of a five year contract with the St. Raymond Snowmobile Club. Two community members are hired each season to groom the 150 km of snowmobile trails. Then, there are another 10 people directly related to running the Relais du Lac Ste-Anne.

"This is a good example of the sort of project RANP supports," says Jean Boucher, economic development advisor with DIAND's Quebec office. "We want to invest in co-management projects that further the socio-economic expansion and development of First Nation communities."

DIAND has invested in other community projects as well. Dr. Louis Lesage, biologist and member of the Huron-Wendat community is excited by early results of an experimental wildlife management project that's partially funded by the department. "This is the second year we've done pre-commercial thinning during the winter. It's a different approach in a number of ways," he observed. "We cut the trees about three feet up the trunk — rather than close to the base of the tree, as is commonly done during the summer. At the ground level, this leaves essential cover for smaller wild animals and allows for the re-growth of trees. It's better for the environment and it's much easier to get into the bush when

the ground is frozen. Even without wearing snowshoes, we can get into places that we can't come near during the summer."

The winter thinning technique has been developed with Laval University and la Forêt Montmorency, and it's proven to be an efficient system. "This past winter, a team of five cleared 55 hectares in thirteen days," says Lesage. "During the summer, it would take the same number of people six weeks to clear the same number of hectares!"

Easier access and the absence of dense ground cover are certainly key to the efficiency of winter thinning. And perhaps the fact that the people doing the clearing don't have to deal with black flies, mosquitos and the heat helps, too.

Whatever the reasons, Louis Lesage is confident the project will result in more companies doing pre-commercial clearing during the winter months in the future. "It's a practical solution for forest and wildlife managers," he stresses, "the result of research made possible by a partnership between provincial and federal levels

of government, academia and private industry. We can all benefit from those kinds of partnerships."



Photo : Conseil de la Nation huronne-wendat

Doing pre-commercial thinning of the forests during the winter protects essential cover for smaller wild animals and allows for the re-growth of trees. It's also a much more efficient system. Workers like this one can clear up to 55 hectares in two weeks... an area that would take six weeks during the summer!

A sweet success story...

- Awazibi Pure Maple Syrup -



Using plastic spouts and tubing to collect sap is less labour intensive and more hygienic than the traditional method of hanging a bucket on each maple tree.

Photo : Annabelle Dionne

Blending tradition with technology" is more than just an advertising slogan for the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation. They are tapping maples, as their ancestors did hundreds of years before the arrival of the Europeans. But there are no birch bark buckets here, no sap boiling over open fires in the bush. Instead, they've combined traditional knowledge and modern technology to create a booming business.

Photo : Annabelle Dionne

This community, south of Maniwaki, has turned a 57-hectare mixed growth of maple hardwoods into a commercial 12,000 tap maple syrup operation. The community made an important strategic decision about 10 years ago to preserve its common lands so that the trees, including the stand of sugar maples, could replenish themselves. A number of people in the Kitigan Zibi community depend on the forestry industry, but a balance was reached between the need for jobs and the need to preserve the forest — and the First Nation's future.

It was, the community decided, time to stop cutting and start tapping. Since a sugar maple tree can be successfully tapped for at least 100 years, a maple syrup business was one with obvious potential. Three years ago, that potential became reality.

"DIAND and Aboriginal Business Canada came through with about 50 percent of the money we needed to get the business started," says Chief Jean-Guy Whiteduck. "This covered the original infrastructure costs, including a road into the site and the building where the evaporator is located. But the idea was always that Awazibi Pure Maple Syrup become self-sustaining. Products produced had to cover expenses. And we've done it. Since that first season, we haven't received any funding from anyone. We're breaking even," he says. "And now we're moving into the

"In three years, the community has increased the number of taps from ten thousand to twelve thousand."

Norm Odjick



Liquid gold... Approximately 12,000 litres of Awazibi Maple Syrup are produced each year.



Making maple syrup in the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation has become big business. This building, nestled in the woods south of Maniwaki, houses an evaporator and three 2,300-litre fibreglass holding tanks.

secondary products market, with candies and maple butter. With good management, this is an aspect of our local economy that should sustain itself for years to come. It's also a business that incorporates our traditional ways."

Even the company's name reflects the community's roots: Awazibi means 'to carry maple water' in the Algonquin language. But, "carrying maple water" has progressed far beyond the traditional birch bark buckets of years ago. "In three years, the community has increased the number of taps from 10,000 to 12,000," explains Norm Odjick, the Assistant Community Services Director. "We are currently preparing to add another 5,000 taps for the upcoming season."

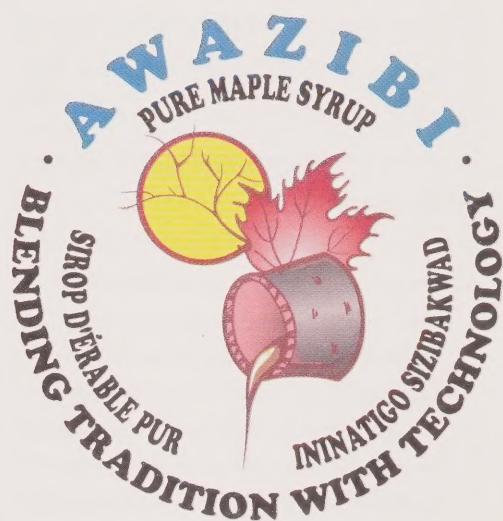
The oil-fired sap-processing plant keeps four employees busy nearly 24 hours a day during the nine-week production season. The operation works on a vacuum system that keeps the sap moving through several kilometres of plastic tubing into three 2,300-litre fibreglass holding tanks. The process can produce approximately 680 litres of syrup every 10 hours. About 12,000 litres of the syrup is produced annually. But demand is growing and the community sees opportunities in the retail market.

Awazibi Pure Maple Syrup suffered a setback at the end of the most recent sugaring-off season with the sudden death of its manager, Tom Ferguson. "It was a great loss," says Norm Odjick. "Tom had been the moving force behind the syrup operation since its very beginning. He was very

knowledgable in every technical aspect of the production and had a solid background in horticulture, too. We'll miss him."

And although some change under a yet-to-be named new manager is inevitable, Awazibi Pure Maple Syrup will stay grounded in its heritage. "This year, we held a 'first tap' ceremony," explains Odjick. "We invited the students of Kitigan Zibi Kikinamadinan, our local school, to this spiritual ceremony that allows us to honour the trees and give thanks for another successful season. It reflects our belief that when you take something from nature, you must give something back."

It's a belief Tom Ferguson would certainly have shared.



For more information about
*Awazibi Pure Maple
Syrup, contact:*

Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, PO Box 309
Maniwaki, Quebec, J9E 3C9
Phone: (819) 449-5170
Fax: (819) 449-5673

Finding the balance

- Montagnais du Lac Saint-Jean -

When the Montagnais du Lac Saint-Jean began negotiating with the private sector two years ago to develop part of the forest close to the Ashuapmushuan Wildlife Reserve, it faced opposition from an unusual source — members of its own community. "We had a tough time bringing the trappers on-board," explains band council Secretary General Alain Nepton. "There were some fierce debates about whether we should be doing *any* cutting in the area. I can understand it. After all, we've always been hunters and trappers, not loggers."

The Council managed to convince the trappers that any cutting of the mixed forest near Roberval would be done in a way that would have minimal impact on the environment. That opened the way to co-management contracts with Abitibi-Consolidated and jobs for the community.

Forty members of the Montagnais du Lac Saint-Jean First Nation work full time between May and September, doing pre-commercial clearing — thinning dense stands of spruce, birch and aspen to allow the remaining trees to grow. It's very labour intensive work but it's essential. An overly dense forest grows very slowly, which eventually limits the amount of marketable wood that can be harvested.

Photo : Conseil des Montagnais du Lac-St-Jean



The Montagnais du Lac St. Jean plan to offer guided canoe trips along traditional trade routes — if they succeed in negotiating the rights to co-manage the recreational and tourism areas of the Ashuapmushuan Wildlife Reserve.

Maximizing profits is important, but protection of the environment is still one of the community's top priorities. "We have to find a balance between development and conservation," stresses Alain Nepton. "That's why it's essential that we find the right partners."

Since June 2000, the Montagnais du Lac Saint-Jean have partnered with Abitibi-Consolidated on a timber salvage project that uses the environmentally-responsible block cutting method. Also known as the "cut and leave" or "checker board" method, it's designed to leave as much timber as is taken. The cutting is done with consideration given to the lakes and rivers, wildlife habitat, erosion control, seed source and esthetics. The blocks of timber left standing are designed to allow a protected corridor in the forest for the wildlife.

Photo : Conseil des Montagnais du Lac-St-Jean



Forestry workers clear a section of the mixed wood forest near the Ashuapmushuan Wildlife Reserve. The block cutting, or "cut and leave" method is designed to leave as much timber as is taken. The trees left standing provide a protected corridor in the forest for the wildlife.

"It's controlled approach to cutting," stresses Nepton. "People talk today about 'sustainable development' as though it's something new. But it's always been the First Nations tradition to make decisions not just for us, but for generations to come. *That's* sustainable development!"

The band council also has a contract in place with Hydro Quebec. Between 16 and 20 members of the community work each season, keeping the area clear around power transmission lines. "The jobs are important," says Nepton, "But just as important is the way in which the work is done. We wanted the contract because we'll clear manually rather than use heavy chemical pesticides which poison the soil."



Many tourists, especially Europeans, are looking for peace and quiet... and an authentic First Nations "wilderness experience."

Like many communities in Quebec, the Montagnais du Lac Saint-Jean are looking beyond forestry contracts for other economic opportunities. The band council is currently preparing to negotiate the co-management of recreational and tourism areas of the Ashuapmushuan Wildlife Reserve.

An investment of \$110,000 has already been put towards the preparations for negotiations: \$30,000 from the band council and \$80,000 from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, through its Resource Access Negotiation Plan.

Photo : Conseil des Montagnais du Lac-St-Jean

"The jobs are important, but just as important is the way in which the work is done. We wanted the contract because we'll clear manually rather than use heavy chemical pesticides which poison the soil."

Alain Nepton

"Co-management of the recreational and tourism areas of the Ashuapmushuan Wildlife Reserve would be a natural for us," says Gilbert Courtois, the band council's Director of Heritage, Culture and Land. "The Montagnais were traditionally nomadic. Our people used to travel all over the territory, hunting, trapping and trading. We know this land."

The community's plans for the future involve capitalizing on tourism opportunities. "People are looking for a different kind of experience," explains Courtois. "Europeans are particularly fascinated by the First Nations 'wilderness experience.' And that's something we can give them."

Some of the plans currently in development include guided three-day canoe trips between Lake Marquette and Lake Ashuapmushuan, and other traditional routes travelled by the Montagnais, Cree, and Atikamekw. Lake Ashuapmushuan is key to the region's history. This was where, years ago, members of various First Nations met to trade.

"It's important to get people in the community involved in these projects," says Gilbert Courtois. "We have such a rich culture. Sharing our language and our stories is one way of keeping it alive."

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- Since 1998, DIAND has invested more than \$10 million in 173 projects and initiatives related to Quebec Aboriginal businesses.

105

- In the past 10 years, the number of new Aboriginal businesses has exceeded those of the rest of the Canadian population by 105 percent. Of 20,000 registered Aboriginal businesses across Canada, there are 2,349 in Quebec.

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- The Aboriginal workforce will grow at twice the rate of the total Canadian labour force in the next 10 years.
- Most Aboriginal businesses are located in remote communities and have fewer than 10 employees.
- Fifty percent of the population in Aboriginal communities is under the age of 25 – a number that is rising every year.
- More than 27,000 First Nations and Inuit students are currently enrolled in colleges and universities.

